

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 20, 2018

The Honorable Emily Murphy
Administrator
U.S. Government Services Administration
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20405

Dear Administrator Murphy,

Today, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released an investigative report into the prevalence of asbestos in federal buildings. The report found that the General Services Administration (GSA) has failed to properly monitor and record information regarding asbestos in its federal buildings, potentially putting the health and safety of federal employees at risk.

The potential long-term health effects from exposure to asbestos can be profound. In 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that in the United States alone more than 2,500 people died from malignant mesothelioma, a deadly disease linked to asbestos exposure. Asbestos-related diseases, such as mesothelioma and lung cancer, often develop decades after exposure has occurred.

As you are aware, GSA's policy requires that the agency should have an asbestos survey in each building constructed prior to 1998, when asbestos was widely used in building construction, and should enter the results of that survey into GSA's building inventory database, IRIS. However, according to GAO, asbestos-related survey data was missing for 66 percent of the 436 GSA-controlled office buildings constructed prior to 1998.

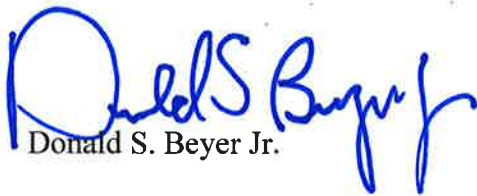
In addition, although GSA policy requires annual reinspection of asbestos-containing material in federal buildings to assess their condition and whether they pose a potential health risk, the GSA's inventory database that is supposed to track this information did not have a data field designed to capture the reinspection information. Adding a data field to properly capture this information should not be a difficult fix.

According to GSA officials cited in GAO's report, a complete update to the GSA building inventory database would cost an estimated \$550,000, which would include between \$50,000 and \$100,000 for specific asbestos reporting requirement upgrades. GAO found that GSA has not yet made any decision to fund the upgrade to the database and GSA currently has no alternative plan in place to capture the critical asbestos data.

The GAO recommended that GSA take action to address asbestos-related shortcomings in the agency's federal building database by: (1) implementing a plan to enter the missing asbestos data (either by obtaining the \$550,000 for system upgrades or training additional individuals to use the current database); and (2) adding a mechanism to track the reinspection data for asbestos-containing materials (or ensuring that the aforementioned database upgrade includes this fix).

Failure to make these minor upgrades to the system would be negligent with regard to federal employees' health and safety. We urge you to prioritize this \$550,000 for the database system upgrades in your FY2020 budget request, or make alternative plans immediately so that GSA is fully tracking and recording asbestos in its federal buildings, as required, moving forward.

Sincerely,



Donald S. Beyer Jr.



Gerald E. Connolly